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Honour, community and hierarchy in the feasts of the archery and crossbow guilds of Bruges, 1445–81

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A B S T R A C T

Archery and crossbow guilds first appeared in the fourteenth century in response to the needs of town defence and princely calls for troops. By the fifteenth century these guilds existed across northern Europe. Despite this they have not received the attention they deserve, and have even been dismissed as little more than militias. An analysis of the uniquely detailed account books of the two Bruges guilds, the archers of St Sebastian and the crossbowmen of St George, reveals much about their social activities, and especially their annual meals. Feasts were important to the guilds in three main ways. Firstly, they demonstrated the guild's status and wealth. Secondly, meals helped to strengthen the bonds of the community. The guild's community could include not just members resident in Bruges, but also shooters from other towns and even leading noblemen. Thirdly, and in contrast to this, communal meals were an occasion to exhibit the hierarchy present within these guilds. Hierarchy is shown through the range of foods purchased, and through the seating plans preserved in the St Sebastian's guild accounts.

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Fifteenth-century Bruges was the second largest city in the Low Countries and one of the most important marketplaces in western Europe.¹ Though its economy was in decline, in 1450 Bruges

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¹ Abbreviations: RAB, Rijksarchief Brugge; SAB, Stadsarchief Brugge; BAS, Brugge, Archief van de Sint-Sebastiaansgilde.

maintained a population of over 36,000.² As befitting a city with such cultural and economic prominence, Bruges had a strong festive tradition, many elements of which have been studied.³ The procession of the Holy Blood, in which a vial said to contain Christ's blood was carried around the city walls, was one of the most famous in the Low Countries.⁴ Richer townsmen took part in the urban jousts of the White Bear,⁵ while religious organisations catered to all levels of Bruges society.⁶ Bruges was also the setting for noble celebrations: most famously, Charles the Bold's marriage to Margaret of York in 1468 presented a spectacle John Paston compared to the court of King Arthur.⁷ The guilds of archers and crossbowmen, ostensibly founded for civic defence, were another important part of Bruges' vibrant civic culture, but have received far less attention from historians.⁸

The origins of the archery and crossbow guilds of Bruges are unclear, but may go back to the late thirteenth-century militia.⁹ Over the fourteenth century the two communities, the archers of St Sebastian and the crossbowmen of St George, became important social groups. They received privileges, owned lands, and had their own chapels dedicated to their patron saints, all of which helped to make the guilds two of the most influential civic groups.

The archers of St Sebastian and the crossbowmen of St George both kept account books. The crossbowmen's accounts begin in 1445, with a gap from 1465 to 1470, and become fragmentary from 1481.¹⁰ A separate membership list was kept from 1437.¹¹ The archers' accounts survive in four registers, covering 1454–6, 1460–5, 1465–72 and 1472–81. The last two of these, however, are incomplete.¹² The accounts of both guilds provide great insight into guild life, membership and devotional activities, as well as the guilds' annual meals, which are the focus of the present paper. Both guilds held two annual meals, one on their patronal saint's day, and another following their annual shooting competition, known as the *papegay*.

The feasts of the Bruges shooting guilds can be analysed to demonstrate how meals were simultaneously used to show status, create community and emphasise hierarchy. Firstly meals, especially

² P. Stabel, 'Composition et recomposition du réseaux urbaine de Pays-Bas au moyen âge', in: *Villes de Flandre et d'Italie*, ed. A.E. Crouzet-Paran and E. Lecuppre-Desjardin (Studies in European Urban History 12, Turnhout 2008), 29–58. See also W. Blockmans and others, *Studiën betreffende de sociaal structuren te Brugge Kortrijk en Gent in de 14e en 15e eeuw* (Heule, 1971–73); J.-A. Van Houtte, *Geschiedenis van Brugge* (Brugge, 1982), 25–83; J. Dumolyn, 'Population et structures professionnelles à Bruges aux XIVe et XVe siècles', *Revue du Nord*, 81 (1999), 43–64; P. Stabel, 'From market to shop, retail and urban space in late medieval Bruges', in: *Buyers and sellers. Retail circuits and practices in medieval and early modern Europe*, ed. B. Blonde and others (Studies in European Urban History 9, Turnhout, 2006), 79–101; W. Blockmans, 'Brugge als Europeen handelscentrum', in: *Brugge en Europa* ed. E. Aert, W. Blockmans and others (Brugge, 1992), 41–55; J. Murray, 'Of nodes and networks: Bruges and the infrastructure of trade in fourteenth-century Europe', in: *International trade in the Low Countries (14th–16th Centuries). Merchants, organisation, infrastructure*, ed. P. Stabel, B. Blonde and A. Greve (Leuven, 2000), 1–14; R. van Uytven, 'Stages of economic decline: late medieval Bruges', in: *Peasants and townsmen in medieval Europe*, ed. J.-M. Duvosquel and E. Thoen (Gent, 1995), 259–69.

³ A. Brown, *Civic ceremony and religion in Bruges c.1300–1520* (Cambridge, forthcoming). I am grateful to Dr Brown for access to the unpublished text.

⁴ A. Brown, 'Civic ritual: Bruges and the count of Flanders in the later middle ages', *English Historical Review*, 112 (1997), 277–99; T.A. Boogart, 'Our Saviour's blood: procession and community in late medieval Bruges', in: *Moving subjects. Processional performance in the middle ages and the renaissance*, ed. K. Ashley and W. Husken (Amsterdam, 2001), 69–116.

⁵ A. Brown, 'Urban jousts in the later middle ages: the White Bear of Bruges', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 78 (2000), 315–30; A. van den Abeele, *Ridderlijk gezelschap van de witte beer* (Brugge, 2000).

⁶ A. De Schodt, 'Confrérie de Notre-Dame de l'Arbre Sec', *Annales de la Société d'Émulation de la ville de Bruges*, 28 (1876–7), 141–87; A. Brown, 'Bruges and the Burgundian "theatre-state": Charles the Bold and Our Lady of the Snow', *History*, 84 (1999), 573–89.

⁷ John Paston III to Margaret Paston, 8 July 1468, in *Paston letters and papers of the fifteenth century* ed. N. Davis, R. Beadle and C. Richmond, 3 vols (Oxford, 1971–2005), vol. 1, 538–40, no. 330.

⁸ Though both have been written about: H. Godard, *Histoire de la gilde des archers de Saint Sébastien de la ville de Bruges* (Bruges, 1947); M. Lemahieu, *De koninklijke hoofdgilde Sint-Sebastiaan Brugge, 1379–2005* (Brugge, 2005); L. A. Vanhoutryre, *De Brugse kruisbooggilde van Sint-Joris* (Handzame, 1968).

⁹ For an overview, see E. van Autenboer, *De kaarten van de schuttersgilden van het Hertogdom Brabant (1300–1800)*, 2 vols (Tilburg, 1993–4); L.-A. Delaunay, *Étude sur les anciennes compagnies d'archers, d'arbalétriers et d'arquebusiers* (Paris, 1879); W. Iven and others, *Schuttersgilden in Noord-Brabant ('s-Hertogenbosch, 1983)*; J.A. Jolles, *De schuttersgilden en schutterijen van Zeeland. Overzicht van hetgeen nog bestaat* (Middelburg, 1934).

¹⁰ SAB, 385, Sint Joris, register met ledenlijst, 1321–1531.

¹¹ SAB, 385, Sint Joris, rekeningen, 1445–80.

¹² BAS, volume 3, rekeningboeken, 1455–72, and volume 4, rekeningboeken, 1468–1513.

purchases of wine and expensive foods, can be considered as part of the performance associated with high status and honour. Secondly meals created a sense of community, of fraternity through commensality that extended far beyond Bruges. Finally, meals made manifest the inherent social hierarchy within guilds, well illustrated from seating plans preserved in the archers' records.

Meals as displays of wealth and status: the 1449 feast of the crossbowmen of St George

The importance of conspicuous consumption, in the display, quantity and quality of food, has been shown for aristocratic and craft guild meals.¹³ For the crossbowmen of Bruges, spending large sums of money on feasts helped to strengthen their identity and self image as rich and powerful men. As their meals were restricted to guild members, these occasions may not have been ones for outward conspicuous consumption, but the events enhanced internal guild identity

In general, the crossbowmen's accounts are less detailed than the archers', but for several meals the details recorded for the feasts are striking. For example in 1449 and 1450 significant sums were spent on meals. The 1449 meal will be discussed below: the 1450 meal on the *papegay* day was also costly, with the guild spending a total of £5 3s. 1d. This sum included 3s. to a table-maker, 1s. 2d. on tableware, £1 4s. 4d. on expensive wine, 2s. 9d. on a cheaper sort, and 13s. on two types of beer.¹⁴ The accounts for 1449 meal are more detailed, recording not just totals spent, but including a breakdown of the varieties of food and drinks purchased. This period, 1449–50, was an important one, and it is significant that the Bruges crossbowmen chose to invest a considerable sum in their meals in these years, making a fitting demonstration of the magnificence of a guild feast. This was a period of peace, after the Bruges revolt of 1436–38,¹⁵ and before the Ghent war began in 1451,¹⁶ in a wealthy city.

The 1449 *papegay* meal followed the pattern of other guild feasts, and was probably, like others, attended by around 130 members.¹⁷ The meal was preceded by a mass, held in the guild's chapel, and singers of the mass were paid 2s.¹⁸ During the service, and at the meal that followed it, the members should have been in guild livery. It is tempting to imagine that the crossbowmen, like English craftsmen, processed two by two from church to guild hall in full livery, making an impression on the town, but no evidence of the journey from church to hall survives.¹⁹

A striking aspect of the records for the 1449 meal is the scale of the sums spent on high-status food and drink. The crossbowmen purchased three cuts of fine ham, and three of a cheaper sort, as well as five pieces of beef, 30 chickens, 12 geese and 12 rabbits, along with four pounds of lard for cooking. The crossbowmen were also provided with three pastries and 16 tarts.²⁰ No information is given in guild records about where the food was purchased, but as few crossbowmen were butchers, it seems likely the meat was purchased in the market.

The 1449 meal provides a good example of how costly guild meals could become, though it was neither exceptional nor singular. At other meals fine spices as well as quantities of fowl, like partridge,

¹³ For aristocratic meals see C.M. Woolgar, 'Fast and feast; conspicuous consumption and the diet of the nobility in the fifteenth century', in: *Revolution and consumption in late medieval England*, ed. M. Hicks (Woodbridge, 2001), 9–11; J.M. van Winter, 'A wedding party at the court of Holland in 1369', in J.M. van Winter, *Spices and comfits: collected papers on medieval food* (Totnes, 2007), 303–17; Y. Morel, 'Les Banquets à la cour de Bourgogne au XVe siècle. Récits des chroniqueurs et données des comptes', *Food and History*, 4:1 (2006), 67–84; Y. Morel, '"Et ce jour mondit seigneur fist fere ung banquet": les banquets à la cour de Philippe le Bon et Charles le Téméraire', *Publications du Centre Européen d'Études Bourguignonnes (XIVe–XVIe s.)*, 47 (2007), 55–72. For craft-guild meals see S. Lindenbaum, 'Rituals of exclusion: feasts and plays of the English religious fraternities', in: *Festive drama. Papers from the sixth triennial colloquium of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Theatre, Lancaster, 13–19th July, 1989*, ed. M. Twycross (Cambridge, 1996), 57–8; G. Rosser, 'Going to the fraternity feast; commensality and social relations in late medieval England', *Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), 446.

¹⁴ SAB, 385, Sint Joris, rekeningen, 1445–80, f. 34 r–v.

¹⁵ J. Dumolyn, *De Brugse opstand van 1436–1438* (Kortrijk-Heule, 1997).

¹⁶ For this war, see D. Nicholas, *Medieval Flanders* (London, 1992), 329–37; R. Vaughan, *Philip the Good* (London, 1970), 303–33.

¹⁷ Brown, *Civic ceremony and religion in Bruges*.

¹⁸ A chapel they had owned since 1321: SAB, 385, Sint Joris, gildeboek met ledenlijst, f.71r–v; for mass payments, SAB, 385, Sint Joris, rekeningen, 1445–80, f. 22.

¹⁹ Rosser, 'Going to the fraternity feast', 434.

²⁰ SAB, 385, Sint Joris, rekeningen, 1445–80, f. 21–2v.

typically consumed by or reserved for those of high status, graced their tables.²¹ In 1470 a heron was purchased.²² one heron would not have fed around 130 guild brethren, and most must have eaten the 12 geese and 33 chickens that were also purchased.²³ In Bruges, regular spending by patricians on foods in these categories was an established way of demonstrating growing status through the language of food, and also of setting out status within the guild.²⁴ In buying expensive foods, especially birds commonly reserved for the aristocracy, the feasts of the crossbowmen were catering for a range of members, including those of high status as well as those who aspired to this standing.²⁵

While the varieties of meats purchased in 1449 are important, so too are the quantities of drinks purchased. These amounted to 7 stoops of expensive Rhine wine and 9 stoops of a cheaper red wine.²⁶ One tun of beer imported from Delft and a small amount of cheaper local beer were purchased. How the wine and beer were allocated is not recorded, but given the differentiation in food, and the seating plans from the archers' records, it seems likely that men of high status had wine, while others had beer. The social difference between beer drinkers and wine drinkers was well understood elsewhere, and it seems certain a distinction was observed within the guild.²⁷

More wine was probably received as gifts: the town gave the guild money equivalent to two stoops of wine each Sunday, and more for their annual meal. Gifts of wine also came from other shooting guilds. Every year the St George guild gave four stoops of wine to the archers and to another group known as the 'young crossbowmen'.²⁸ The archers similarly gave four stoops to the crossbowmen of St George and to the young crossbowmen.²⁹ Although records have not survived for the the young crossbowmen, it seems likely that they would have reciprocated — and the crossbowmen of St George would probably have been given a total of eight stoops of wine, that is, with wine purchased, a total of 24 stoops (less than 30 litres). This is not a large amount, and implies that many members did not drink wine. Just as with the meats, there were different expectations of consumption among members of the guild; the presence of the rich foods and the fine wines, however, would have enhanced the occasion and the status of the guild.

The records of the 1449 meal show how it was planned and executed. The accounts include payments to those who prepared and served the meal. A waiter was paid 2s., and a cook 4s., with an additional 8d. to members who inspected the preparations the day before the feast.³⁰ Though their exact duties are not clear, that the guilds hired men to serve the food, rather than using their own members — many of whom were in Bruges' food and drink trades — or their services, is important. The crossbowmen also attended to other practical matters, spending 4s. on a new table, and 11s. on cloth and plates. As this is the first

²¹ Brown, *Civic ceremony and religion in Bruges*.

²² For the significance of heron, especially the vows of the heron, see M. Keen, *Chivalry* (London, 1984), 213–15, and more generally, N. Sykes, 'The dynamics of status symbols: wildfowl exploitation in England AD 410–1550', *Archaeological Journal*, 161 (2005), 82–105; D. Serjeanston, 'Birds: food and a mark of status', in: *Food in late medieval England. Diet and nutrition*, ed. C.M. Woolgar, D. Serjeanston and T. Waldron (Oxford, 2006), 131–47; see also C.M. Woolgar, 'Gifts of food in late medieval England', *Journal of Medieval History*, this issue.

²³ SAB, 385, Sint Joris, rekeningen 1445–80, f. 203v–204.

²⁴ A. Erynck, 'Following the rule? Fish and meat consumption in monastic communities in Flanders (Belgium)', in: *Environment and subsistence in medieval Europe. Papers of the 'Medieval Europe Brugge 1997' Conference*, 9, ed. G. de Boe and F. Verhaeghe (Rapporten, 1998), 67–89.

²⁵ Many of the members were nobles, from the recently ennobled de Themseke family to great chivalric figures like Louis de Gruuthuse. I am grateful to Dr F. Buylaert for giving me access to his thesis, 'Eeuwen van mmbitie edelen: steden en sociale mobiliteit in laatmiddeleeuws Vlaanderen', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Ghent, 2008), as well as to his ongoing research into Flemish nobility.

²⁶ Stoop: a measure of approximately 1.2 litres, M. Sommé, 'Étude comparative des mesures à vin dans les états bourguignons au XVe siècle', *Revue du Nord*, 58 (1976), 171–83.

²⁷ For the difference in Tournai, see G. Small, 'Centre and periphery in late medieval France: Tournai, 1384–1477', in: *War, government and power in late medieval France*, ed. C. Allmand (Liverpool, 2000), 145–74; for the difference between wine and cider in England, see Woolgar, 'Gifts of food', this issue.

²⁸ A third shooting guild in Bruges. Exactly what was understood by 'younger' is unclear: it has been suggested it was a youth group, but the guild charters do not refer to age of members. No account books or membership books have survived from the 'younger' crossbow guild; their earliest charters are dated 1435, SAB, 385, Sint Joris, jongehof, 1. This charter refers to the 'old guild' governing the 'young guild'. For the gifts SAB, 385, Sint Joris, rekeningen, 1445–80, f. 22.

²⁹ Godar, *Histoire de la gilde des archers*, 80–137.

³⁰ SAB, 385, Sint Joris, rekeningen, 1445–80, f. 22v.

mention in the accounts of purchasing furniture, such expenses could imply the number of attendees was growing in 1449, or that an older table was no longer usable. It would be fascinating to know more about the types of cloth purchased, especially in a cloth centre where so much choice would have been available, but once more registers give only brief, financial details, not descriptions.

Entertainment was also a feature of the meal, as it was for many urban and aristocratic meals and events.³¹ Two trumpeters were paid 3s. for their service, though it is not clear from the records whether the trumpeters were providing music or announcing guests.³² After the meal came a greater form of entertainment, a play of St George and the dragon, perhaps recalling besides the martial origins of the guild. Exactly what this consisted of is not clear from the records, as again they list only payments and do not describe the action. Despite these limitations, some conclusions can be reached. Firstly the play was not new in 1449 as the meticulous accounts would probably have given details of a newly constructed dragon, and there is no reference to this. The dragon is described as 'pulled': presumably this means the dragon was on some form of wheeled conveyance, perhaps a cart of some sort, and that the play took place in a large space, either in the guild's garden or on the street. Though a man was paid for 'being St George', only 1s. 8d. was spent on St George's finery, suggesting that the guild already had suitable attire for their patron saint.³³ Most of the cost was in adding to the costume the Burgundian symbol of two arrows arranged in a saltire.³⁴ The device was highly symbolic: in the years around 1449 Philip the Good had given many other shooting guilds the right to wear this ducal emblem.³⁵ Philip was himself a member of the guild, and this was a fitting demonstration of the guild's loyalty. The expense of St George's updated clothing, like those on the new table, cloth and plate, suggests that the feast of 1449 was larger than that of previous years or of renewed magnificence.

The spectacle of 1449 was an impressive way for the crossbowmen to demonstrate their status to all observers, and to remind members of their influential position. The guild spent a total of £5 15s. 8d., a significant sum to spend on a single occasion on food and drink in Bruges, where the daily wage of a master carpenter was 11s. — that is, the meal cost just over 10 days' wages.³⁶ Most of the costs were met by the guild themselves, primarily from membership fees. The shooting guilds were powerful and privileged groups in fifteenth-century Bruges and, in recognition of their status, the city aldermen gave the guild £6 each year. This sum is tantalisingly close to the costs of the meal, but was given for shooting on the day of the *papegay*, for the costs of practising and maintaining the guild's garden, as well as for honorific expenses such as wine.

The quality of the feast of 1449 and its associated events were a powerful demonstration of the standing of the guild and underscored the honour attached to membership. This is true even for those who, though present, did not consume the high-status foodstuffs and drinks, as the occasion was about spectacle as well as consumption.³⁷ Further, the feast shows the important place hospitality and sociability played in the crossbow guild, in strengthening their identity and displaying their wealth and status.

Meals as unifying events for the shooting guilds of Bruges

Shooting guilds, like religious fraternities and craft groups, stressed unity. One of the most important rituals of solidarity for all groups was the holding of annual feasts. Meals presented opportunities to

³¹ R. Strohm, *Music in late medieval Bruges* (Oxford, 1990).

³² In some English meals, visitors were announced by trumpeters: C.M. Woolgar, *The great household in late medieval England* (New Haven, 1999), 26–7, 176–7.

³³ SAB, 385, Sint Joris, rekeningen, 1445–80, f. 22.

³⁴ For the dukes and their emblems, see L. Hablot, 'Les Signes de l'entente. Le Rôle des devises et des ordres dans les régions diplomatiques entre les ducs de Bourgogne et les princes étrangers de 1380 à 1477', *Revue du Nord*, 84 (2002), 319–41; E. Hutchinson, 'Partisan identity in the French civil war, 1405–1418: reconsidering the evidence of livery badges', *Journal of Medieval History*, 33 (2007), 250–74.

³⁵ The charters of Philip the Good, including ones to the shooting guilds, are being analysed by J. Braekevelt, for his doctoral thesis at the University of Ghent, 'Ordonances of Philip the Good for the county of Flanders and lordship of Malines'. I am very grateful to him for providing transcriptions, particularly of the charters granted to the shooters of Tiel in 1447, and to the archers of Berghen Saint Winnoc in 1447, both in Rijksarchief, Gent, Raad van Vlaanderen, n. 7351.

³⁶ M. Howell, *Commerce before capitalism in Europe, 1300–1600* (Cambridge, 2010), 306–7.

³⁷ Woolgar 'Fast and feast', 19.

confirm feelings of brotherhood and a sense of collective identity.³⁸ For the archery and crossbow guilds of Bruges, the meals marked the culmination of a day of confraternal activities, and meals were held either on the day of the patron saint, or on the day of the *papegay*. Ordinances from the town, and rules of the guilds themselves, make clear that all members should have attended the shoot and the meal that followed it.³⁹

For both the archers and the crossbowmen the day of the annual shoot, the *papegay*, commenced with a mass in the guild chapel that all members were expected to attend.⁴⁰ After the shoot the man who had struck the wooden bird — the *papegay* — would be made 'king' for the year, and would receive exemption from some expenses in addition to the prestige that went with the role. The event was held in the garden of the guild of archers or crossbowmen, and would last most of the day, with between 250 and 300 men taking turns to shoot at the bird. After all had taken their turn, the members were to return to the guild's hall for the meal, reinforcing the unity the guilds sought to create through these annual events. In practice, however, this did not occur, and the guilds deviated from the ideals laid out in their prescriptive documents. This difference between the ideal of community and the reality of hierarchy is best shown through close analysis of the records of the archers of St Sebastian.

Prescriptive guild documents are the most common sources for the study of any urban group. Rules and statutes are immensely useful for understanding the ideals driving the actions of guild leaders, but they also present significant problems of interpretation, as the degree to which rules were followed is not apparent. It is here that the St Sebastian records are all the more valuable and instructive. The archers' rules state that all members were to attend the *papegay* shoot each year, and most seemed to obey this rule. An average of 208.5 archers, out of around 250, attended the *papegay* shoots each year between 1455 and 1480.

The meals that followed the *papegay*, and those on the day of St Sebastian, were less well attended (Table 1). The average attendance at the meal of the *papegay* was only 67.7. From this low attendance, it might be assumed that only the richest and most powerful members attended guild meals. However, the St Sebastian guild records provide a more complex picture. Between 1454 and 1480 there are records of 35 meals, listing every man in attendance, with the exception of 1454, between 1457 and 1460, and 1480; despite these gaps, the records reveal a great deal about the potential of meals as unifying events.

The total number of members in this period was 755. Most meals record 'our headman' in attendance, and the two headmen from the period, Jacob Adornes and Jan Breydel, have been excluded from these calculations. Although only small numbers attended each meal, most guild brethren went to at least one meal. Of 753 guild brethren, 256 are never recorded as attending one, but as nine meals are not documented, this number was probably smaller. The majority of members attended less than five meals, showing that the social function and unifying potential of meals was understood, but members were not obliged to attend every year. A small but significant group — 8% — attended 9 to 14 meals over the course of their membership. Only one member of Bruges' leading patrician families attended more than 10 meals. This was Joris Metteneye, an alderman in 1438, 1440, and 1444, who was present at 11 meals.

Of the 12 men who attended more than 20 meals, only two, Jan van Lende and Jan dHondt, son of Jan, ever held civic office. Both of these men were deans of the guild, and may have had a role in organising the meals. Another frequent attendee was Jan tSolles, a rising member of society, who will be discussed as a participant in the meal of 1470. Most frequent attendees, however, were men of more modest means. They were not tax collectors, wealthy merchants, nor civic office holders. Only two others of the 12 held a guild office,⁴¹ and two others were 'kings' of the *papegay*. Many men who held office in the guild, however, and many 'kings' attended far less regularly, and the 12 most regular attendees were not the wealthiest guild members. Of five of them, nothing is known: they never held civic or craft guild positions of authority and never joined any of the richer religious confraternities in Bruges.

³⁸ B.R. McRee, 'Unity or division? The social meaning of guild ceremony in urban communities', in: *City and spectacle in medieval Europe*, ed. B.A. Hanawalt and K.L. Reyson (London, 1991), 189–92; Rosser, 'Going to the fraternity feast', 430–46.

³⁹ SAB, 385, Sint Joris, gildeboek met ledenlijst, f. 52r–v.

⁴⁰ For the archers this was held in their private chapel inside the Franciscan church: BAS, charter, dated 16 October 1456; also Godard, *Histoire de la gilde des archers*, 82–5.

⁴¹ The St Sebastian guild had a dean, 2 'zorghers' or junior officials, and two treasurers. Each of these was elected every year. Though men often held office numerous times, they could not do so in consecutive years.

Table 1

Attendance at the feasts of the archery guild, 1445–54.

Number of meals attended	Number of members	% of members
20 or more	12	1.6
19	0	0
18	2	0.3
17	7	0.9
16	3	0.4
15	4	0.5
14	6	0.8
13	4	0.5
12	9	1.2
11	14	1.9
10	14	1.9
9	12	1.6
8	10	1.3
7	19	2.5
6	21	2.8
5	30	4.0
4	55	7.3
3	58	7.7
2	81	10.8
1	133	17.7
0	256	34.0
Totals	753	100

While this absence of evidence does not prove they were poorer men, it does show that they were not powerful. One was a baker, perhaps involved in supplying the guild meals, but beyond that one can only speculate why these men attended so regularly, while others of similar and even higher status did not. From the meal of 1470, some crafts can be seen as under-represented, but across the 35 meals no pattern is apparent. Involvement in the meal appears to have been the personal choice for a guild brother: guild membership itself was always a personal and considered response, and not a uniform activity.

Although questions of what guild membership meant remain, it is clear that the archers of St Sebastian attempted to build a sense of identity within the guild. Their community could stretch beyond Bruges to other towns, and to the courts of the Valois dukes of Burgundy. Archery and crossbow guilds existed all over northern Europe, and competitions took place almost annually within the Low Countries.⁴² These competitions helped to create festive networks and temporary communities which guild meals could build on and use to strengthen bonds. For example, in 1465, the 'king' of the Wervik archery guild attended the St Sebastian guild meal at Bruges. In the same year, the 'king' of the Ghent guild took part in the procession of the Holy Blood with the Bruges archers.⁴³ Later, in 1470, and again in 1480, the 'king' of the Lille archers attended the feast of St Sebastian.⁴⁴ Visitors from other Flemish archery guilds demonstrate the importance of inter-town festive networks, and that a shared sense of identity as archers could extend far beyond Bruges.

Such far-flung visitors, however, were more occasional than regular. More stable were the bonds that existed between Bruges and the small, neighbouring towns of Damme and Dudzele. Both of these towns shot with the Bruges archers every year, and two men from each attended the feast afterwards.⁴⁵ Large towns and villages had their own shooting guilds, often modelled on, and linked to, a larger town. While there was always potential for conflict between groups of armed men, the guild meals in Bruges apparently helped to keep relations peaceful, as no violence or disorder was reported.

Perhaps more significant than visitors from other Flemish towns who helped to reinforce the bonds of urban festive networks were noble visitors who could create or strengthen links between civic and court cultures. These meals were a focus for just some of the links between the shooting guilds and the

⁴² M. de Schrijver, *Les Concours de tir à l'arbalète des gildes médiévales* (Anvers, 1979).

⁴³ BAS, volume 3, rekeningboeken, 1455–72, f. 6r.

⁴⁴ Godar, *Histoire de la gilde des archers*, 114–23.

⁴⁵ BAS, every year, for example volume 3, rekeningboeken, 1455–72, f. 27v.

court: the crossbowmen of Bruges included many great lords, as did the guilds of Ghent, and even the crossbowmen of the small town of Aalst.⁴⁶ Guild membership lists, however, only reveal that a lord had been enrolled in a guild, and not whether he was active within it. In contrast, the records of the archers of Bruges show lords eating, drinking and shooting with the guild brethren.

The most important nobleman to attend the meals of the archers was Anthony the Great Bastard of Burgundy. He was also registered in the crossbow guild. Beyond Bruges, he had important chivalric connections, and was a member of the order of the Golden Fleece.⁴⁷ In 1463 Anthony attended the *papegay* shoot of the archers of St Sebastian, where he was an active participant. He hit the wooden bird — becoming the guild ‘king’ for that year — and after his achievement Anthony attended the guild meal, eating with the other guild brethren.⁴⁸ Anthony was, by 1463, no stranger to shooting guild activities. He had led the Lille crossbowmen in the Tournai competition of 1455,⁴⁹ and was a member of the guild of Ghent crossbowmen, like his father and every other duke of Burgundy.⁵⁰ Anthony’s attendance was not an isolated act, but rather part of many festive connections between the dukes of Burgundy and their urban subjects.

Guild meals did not create a group of equals, but their importance as unifying events should not be overlooked. While guild statutes attempted to bring all members within Bruges together, all guild brethren did not, and could not, have attended each year. That said, the St Sebastian accounts show two-thirds of the membership attended at least once. For the archers, the ideals of unity and fraternity extended to building a community and a sense of identity across Flanders and involving great aristocratic figures in civic festivals.

Guild unity? A feast seating plan for the guild of archers of St Sebastian, 1470

While guild meals presented opportunities to promote unity, and provided ways of forming social identities within Bruges and beyond, the hierarchy internal to the feast was nonetheless important. Unfortunately, the evidence rarely allows further analysis of the hierarchy present at these ceremonies. Some English craft guilds detail a separate table, and separate foods for officials, but such records suggest only a two-tier structure.⁵¹ As a result, most studies of urban groups, drawing on the guild rules, which survive in far greater numbers than attendance lists, assume a greater degree of uniformity than may have been the case. The accounts of the crossbowmen of Bruges, however, hint at the existence of a richer hierarchy, differentiated by different qualities of food and drink. The existence of a feasting hierarchy can be made even clearer through an analysis of the seating plans in the accounts of the St Sebastian guild (Plate 1).⁵² Several seating plans survive, and though no seating plan describes the size of the tables, nor how they were set out in the guild hall, the plan from 1470 provides an

⁴⁶ Gent, Bijloekemuseum te Gent, Sint Jorisgilde, register der doodschulden, G 12.608; the first name is that of Maximilian, Holy Roman Emperor. This membership list was surveyed in S. Van Steen, ‘Den ouden ende souverainen gilde van den edelen ridder Sente Jooris: het Sint-Jorisgilde te Gent in de 15e eeuw, met prosopografie (1468–1497)’ (unpublished Masters dissertation, University of Ghent, 2006). For Aalst, Aalst, Stadsarchief, Oude Archief, 155, Register Sint Jorisgilde, 1335–1583. The membership list for 1488, f. 4, features Pieter de Lannoy, Lord of Fresnoy.

⁴⁷ J. Clement, ‘Antoine de Bourgogne, dit le Grand Bâtard’, *Publications du Centre Européen d’Études Bourguignonnes* (XIVe–XVIe s.), 30 (1990), 165–85; J.M. Cauchies, ‘Antoine de Bourgogne, dit le Grand Bâtard’, in: *Les Chevaliers de la Toison d’Or au XVe siècle. Notices bio-bibliographiques*, ed. R. de Smedt (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 118–19; C. van den Bergen-Pantens, ‘Héraldique et bibliophilie: le cas d’Antoine, Grand Bâtard de Bourgogne (1421–1504)’, in: *Miscellanées Martin Wittek. Album de codicologie et de paléographie offert à Martin Witte* ed. A. Raman and E. Manning, (Paris, 1993), 332–4.

⁴⁸ BAS, volume 3, rekeningboeken, 1455–72, f. 30v. He attended the shoot again in 1466. Godar states he was again ‘king’, but this is not confirmed by archival documents: Godar, *Histoire de la gilde des archers*, 121–30.

⁴⁹ A. Brown and G. Small, *Court and civic society in the Burgundian Low Countries c.1420–1520* (Manchester, 2007), 221.

⁵⁰ P.J. Arnade, *Realms of ritual. Burgundian ceremony and civic life in late medieval Ghent* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), 69–72.

⁵¹ Rosser, ‘Going to the fraternity feast’, 443–4.

⁵² The following information about administrative roles and professions is drawn from guild records and other sources in Bruges, including the town account, SAB 216, Stadsrekeningen, and lists of urban officials in SAB, 114, Wetsvernieuwingen. Professions are taken from SAB, 366, kuipers; 345, peltier, gildeboek; 324, droogsheerers, gildeboek; 377, kulkstikkers, gildeboek, 1451–62, protocolboek, 1375–777; 299, makelaars, ledenregister; RAB, ambachten, 116, boogmakers; 256–81, rekening van de huidenvetters, 470; vischkoppers, admissions, 1425–95; 487–8, wollewevers, registers. Names of the joustors of the White Bear are drawn from van den Abeele, *Ridderlijk gezelschap van de witte beer*, and those named by the sixteenth-century chronicler, Nicholas Despars, in his *Cronijke van den lande ende graefscpe van Vlanderen van de jaeren 405 tot 1492* (Amsterdam, 1562).

excellent example as it contains fewer abbreviated names, and less ambiguity, than plans from other years.

The meal for St Sebastian's day in January 1470 was attended by 77 men, sitting at five different tables. At the top table sat the 12 most important members of the guild, and one civic official, the *scouthere* (sheriff). Also here, and first on the list, was a man identified by the archers as 'our headman', Jan Breydel.⁵³ The first member to be given by name was Anselm Adornes, who came from one of the richest families in Bruges. Anselm was burgomaster and alderman as well as a courtier and ambassador to the Scottish court for both Philip the Good and Charles the Bold.⁵⁴ Also on this table were two members of the patrician Metteneye family, Corneil and Joris,⁵⁵ both joustors with the White Bear, and holders of municipal offices before 1470.

Many of the 12 men at the top table were from established Bruges families. Not all, however, fit this pattern; an exception was Jan tSolles, dean of the archers in 1455 and 'king' several times. He seems to have been the first of his family to hold any municipal office, and Jan worked his way up the social hierarchy as a town clerk. Between 1438 and 1441 he received an annual pension of £25 from the town; and this was raised to £200 for his pension and robes in 1450. By his death, in 1477, he was a rich property owner, having made much of his fortune from collecting taxes on Bruges' waterways.

Among the others at the table were two treasurers, two *poorters* (citizens with legal and tax rights), and members of other elite guilds, including two more joustors of the White Bear. This was certainly the top table; all but one of the 12 men had either held municipal office or collected some form of tax before 1470. In the guild as a whole, just under 7.5 per cent of members had held municipal office, while 7.3 per cent had collected taxes.

The next table had the largest number of men — 25 — seated at it. This was headed by the new 'king', the winner of the annual shoot, Jan Neerync. The first named member at this table was a previous 'king', Jan van Rake, and the third name was Jan Neerync the elder, presumably the father of the new 'king', and himself a previous 'king'. None of these men held any municipal office, and their names are not recorded among the joustors of the White Bear, nor among the officials of any craft guilds. It seems these were men of lower status in Bruges, but that within the guild, their skills ensured them a place at the second highest table. Two others may have earned their place through their position within the guild. Jacob and Christopher Moerync, almost certainly brothers, had been members of the guild since at least 1455, making them some of its longest standing members. Like the 'kings', neither of these men had held any municipal office or position of power, but they had both been guild members for 25 years, possibly longer. Status within the guild, therefore, appears to have been a deciding factor for inclusion in the second table.

Several of the remaining men at this second table were of higher status. They included four ship-pers, wealthy craftsmen, and three men who would later be part of the town garrison and receive generous pensions for their service. Also here were men of lesser status, including two bowyers, a baker, a brewer and a clerk. Many of the men at the second table may have been younger, such as Joris Hoornewedere, who would later become one of the administering officials (*vinder*) of the joiner's guild, an alderman (*schepen*) in 1483, and a member of the council (*raad*) in 1480. This mixture of younger men who would later acquire positions of power and older members, with less power within the town, is significant. At this table, the next generation of guild power learnt the traditions of the guild from older, experienced members. The second tier of guild society, a mix of old and young, was not as powerful as the top table, but was nonetheless distinct from those on the lower tables.

The remaining three tables included a mixture of professions. Some were from the powerful textile trades, some from the rich goldsmiths, but many were members of lesser professions. The third table

⁵³ On this important figure, executed in 1481 for supporting Maximilian, see P. Breydel, *Bruges et les Breydels* (Brussels, 1975), 212–16.

⁵⁴ For Anselm Adornes and his family, see N. Geirnaert, *Het inventaris van de familie Adornes en de Jeruzalemstichting te Brugge* (Brugge, 1987), 2–15, and 'De Adornes en de Jeruzalemkapel. Internationale contacten in het laat middeleeuwse Brugge', in: *Adornes en Jeruzalem. Internationaal leven in het 15de en 16de eeuwse Brugge*, ed. N. Geirnaert and A. Vandewalle (Brugge, 1983), 21–9; and A. Macquarrie, 'Anselm Adornes of Bruges: traveller in the east and friend of James III', *Innes Review*, 33 (1982), 15–22.

⁵⁵ For this family, see F. Buylaert, *Eeuwen van ambitie. De adel in laatmiddeleeuws Vlaanderen* (Brussels, 2010). This is the son of the Joris, discussed above, who attended 11 meals in all.

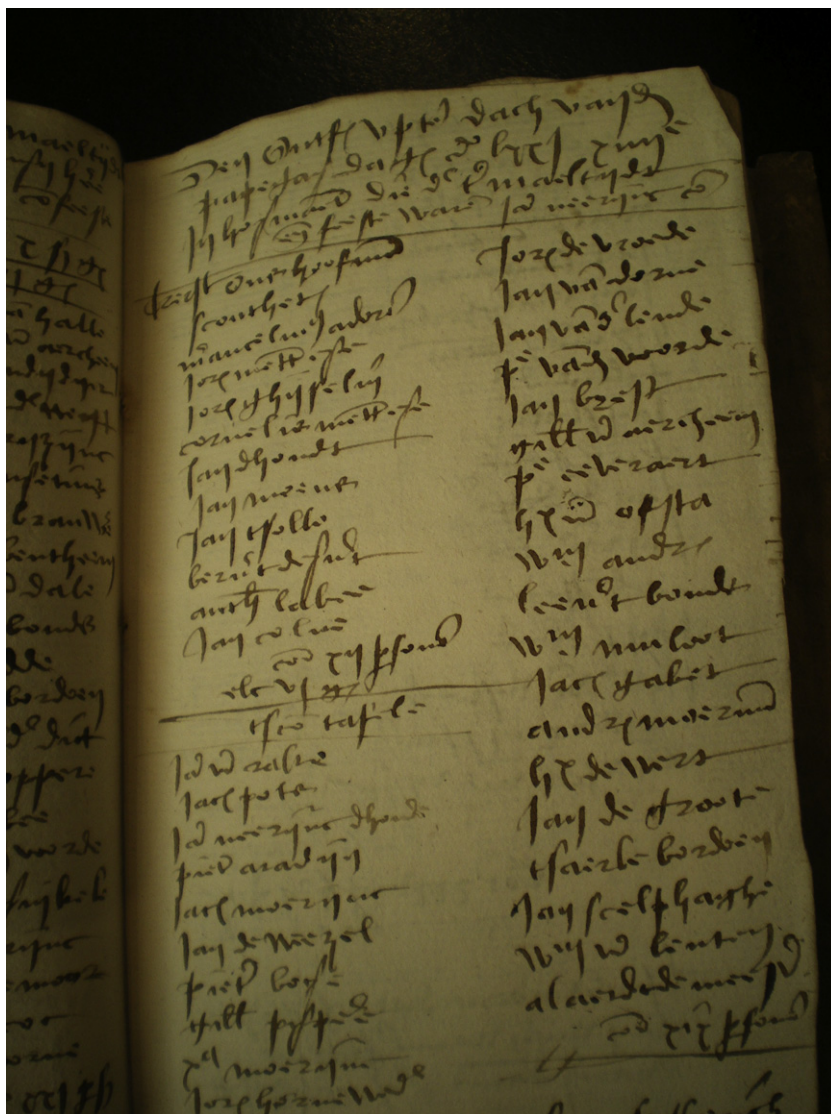


Plate 1. The seating arrangements for the St Sebastian guild feast of January 1470. Bruges, Archief van de Sint-Sebastiaansgilde, volume 3: rekeningboeken, 1455–1472, f. 88 r.

had slightly fewer seated at it than the second table. The 19 places were mainly taken by men from two of the most important professions linked to the guild: weapons, and food and drink. Two men were bowyers, and one was a weapon-maker. A further six were involved in the production or supply of food and drink, with two brewers, a baker, a grain merchant, an innkeeper, and a miller. Three others were richer artisans, with two goldsmiths and one man, Pieter van Voorde, who was paid as Bruges' town carpenter.⁵⁶ Of the remaining men, two were shoemakers, and two were older members whose names do not appear in any other civic records.

⁵⁶ 'Meester temmerman van dese stede'.

The fourth table had only seven men. The composition of this table was very similar to the third, with a mix of members from important crafts and providers of drink. There were three brewers and one beer seller, and with them a goldsmith, a weapon-maker and a butcher. This table should be seen in the same category as the one detailed above, separated for reasons of space, not social distinction. These two tables were the third level of the society, with important craftsmen, but no office holders, representing the upper middle class of the guild, not as powerful as the top tables, but with some wealth and importance.

Fourteen men sat at the fifth and final table, and many were humbler figures than those above. Interestingly the second man, Melsior tSolles, was the son of Jan tSolles, who sat at the top table. Melsior would later become a merchant, but in 1470 he was a young man yet to hold any office. Jan was the first of his family to hold any position of power, and although he was an important figure, both in the guild and in Bruges generally, he was apparently not established enough for his status to pass to his son. Providers of food and drink were present at this table too, with two bakers, a brewer and a spice seller. Also at this table were members of the building crafts, not included in the other tables, with a scaffolder, a bricklayer and a joiner present. There was also one fuller here, and one man, Pieter van Westvoorde, who would later be a town councillor. There is no information about the profession of the remaining four men in any guild account, nor do their names feature in any lists of municipal officials or craft guild records. Although this lack of evidence does not prove these men were of lower status, it does show that they were not as influential as those at the other tables. Those at the last table were the lowest ranking among the guild membership present at the meal. Their physical separation from the aldermen and richer members is significant. The difference in status between the top table, including municipal officials and an ambassador of the dukes of Burgundy, and the lower tables, consisting of craftsmen, is striking. From this some important patterns emerge.

The high number of members of weapon-manufacturing crafts present is not unexpected within an archery guild, and the Bruges shooting guilds retained their military importance through the fifteenth century. In all, there were four bowyers and two weapon-makers at this meal, and this matches the overall composition of the guild. Between 1445 and 1481 just over 2.5 per cent of the archers were bowyers, compared to less than 1 per cent in the militia records of 1436 for Bruges as a whole, while 0.8 per cent of the guild were weapon-makers.⁵⁷ Also striking were the high numbers of those attending who were involved in the production and sale of food and drink. There were four bakers, seven brewers, an innkeeper, a beer seller, a corn merchant, a miller and a spice seller. This is largely in line with the figures for the guild as a whole: 2.1 per cent of the guild were bakers and 2.4 per cent were brewers. These men may have had a hand in the preparation and production of some of the food for the feast.

Other crafts were under-represented at the feast. For example, no weavers or shearers attended this meal, but they made up respectively 2.2 per cent and 1.8 per cent of the guild. Only one bricklayer attended, but 1.7 per cent of the guild were in this craft. Further examples could be given, but it seems clear that this guild meal did not represent a cross section of members. The guild rules suggest that these meals should have been inclusive occasions helping to build community and identity through commensality. The evidence of the 1470 seating plan and others like it, however, shows that there was hierarchy and exclusivity behind the emphasis on community that was so often detailed in prescriptive documents. Though all members could attend, and all in attendance paid just 6d., not all sat together. It seems likely that although all the guild members were served together, the foodstuffs and drink they consumed were differentiated on the basis of status.

Conclusion

Far more could be said about the non-military activities of shooting guilds. Their meals, however, were the most important social occasions for demonstrating community, status, and building bonds. The sums spent on feasting by the crossbowmen in 1449 demonstrated their wealth, with fine wines and expensive cuts of meat on the menu. In the same way, the investment in equipment associated with the

⁵⁷ Dumolyn, *De Brugse opstand*, 353–5.

meal and entertainment created a rich and powerful identity. Meals also strengthened the bonds between the Bruges guilds and those from surrounding towns, as well as links to noble courts. Meals were not just about hospitality and sociability, but also emphasised and reinforced hierarchy among the guild brethren. The seating plans for the St Sebastian guild demonstrate the distinctions between the top table of civic officials, the table of the 'king', the third and fourth tables with a high number of arms and food producers, and the fifth and lowest table with other crafts. For all the wealth spent on meals, and for all the ideals of community they proclaimed, guild feasts were not statements of equality. Hierarchy remained as important as honour and community in the meals of the archery and crossbow guilds of fifteenth-century Bruges.

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